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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DILI 000123

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FOR ADMIRAL KEATING; PACFLT FOR ADMIRAL WILLARD; MARFORPAC FOR
LT GEN STALDER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [MARR](#) [EAID](#) [TT](#)
SUBJECT: F-FDTL'S MILITARY RECRUIT TRAINING PLAN: STEPPING FORWARD
WITH TWO LEFT FEET

REF: LISBON 136

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CLASSIFIED BY: LTC Ron Sargent, US Defense Representative, US
Embassy, Dili, Timor-Leste, Department of Defense.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary. The Timor-Leste Defense Force (F-FDTL) will soon move forward with a recruit training plan which promises to nearly double the size of the force by early 2010. The plan has potentially serious flaws, including the use of newly minted and under-trained officers and NCOs as trainers of enlisted troops, and an overdependence on the Portuguese language as the training medium. The Timorese leadership, which may lack the necessary understanding and experience to consider the plan critically, appears ready to support the concept, with the chief of defense publicly praising its Portuguese designers. While the United States, and in particular the United States Marine Corps, stands ready to assist F-FDTL, implementation of the plan could seriously retard the development of a more professional, better disciplined Timorese military force. End summary.

12. (C) In late 2007 F-FDTL announced a plan to recruit up to 600 new soldiers, NCOs and officers in an effort to expand its ranks. Following the desertion of over 600 soldiers in early-2006 -- events that precipitated that year's violent security sector crisis -- there are currently fewer than 700 serving members in the Timor-Leste Defense Force (F-FDTL). The Government of Timor-Leste views the planned major expansion as the first step towards realization of F-FDTL's Force 2020 plan to create a modern, professional defense force. However, plans to launch the recruitment effort were derailed in 2008 as a result of the attacks on President Jose Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao on February 11, 2008, and by poor planning later in the year.

13. (SBU) 2009 has brought with it a renewed effort to execute the plan to bring the new recruits aboard. Following a commitment by Portugal to assist in developing a basic training regime, to provide three medical personnel (to screen a pool consisting of over a 1,200 candidates), language instructors, and six to eight trainers from the Portuguese Army, the GOTL established an ambitious schedule with by two principal phases: first, the training of recruits who meet stated qualifications to become officers and noncommissioned officers; second, the training of those who are only qualified to become junior enlisted soldiers. During the first phase, which is scheduled to begin in late May, roughly 300 officer and NCO candidates will attend a two-week accelerated Portuguese language course - considered a necessity since the vast majority of recruits will not understand the language, despite its status as one of Timor-Leste's two official languages. The Portuguese Army trainers will then carry out a four-month basic military training regimen in Portuguese for a single, common population of officers and NCO candidates. Phase Two will also be four months long, but will have the newly commissioned and freshly trained officers and NCOs serving as the primary trainers to approximately 300 junior enlisted candidates. Training throughout both phases will follow a normal military training curriculum, and will include subjects like rifle marksmanship, land navigation, communications, and drill and ceremonies. However, it does not appear that the curriculum for the officers and NCOs will be appreciatively different than that of the junior enlisted soldiers and as a result, it is unclear how the capabilities of the officers and NCO corps will differ from that of the junior enlisted population. And with newly commissioned officers and NCOs with no leadership experience serving as the primary trainers in Phase Two, it is unclear how qualitatively effective the training of the junior enlisted soldiers can be.

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14. (C/NF) Of the recruits selected to date, F-FDTL sources are reporting that only 8% are Portuguese "literate". Literacy in the Timorese context may only refer to the ability to speak, and not to write. It likely will not be possible for the officer and NCO recruits to develop sufficient language comprehension following only a two-week intensive language course, nor a reasonable level of professional competence after a four-month basic training course taught in a language in which they will not be proficient. Additionally, this regimen will not qualify them as military professionals by any developed armed forces' standard of measure, and certainly will not make them suitable Phase Two trainers.

15. (C/NF) This methodology is the brainchild of Major Pedro Reis - a Portuguese Army advisor to F-FDTL Metinaro Training Base Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Falur Rate Laek. During his tenure in Metinaro, Reis has developed a reputation of obstinacy and questionable competence - even in the eyes of his Portuguese peers. For example, another Portuguese advisor told our ODC Chief in 2008 that Reis insisted on teaching courses to F-FDTL juniors officers in Portuguese, despite the fact that the majority of serving F-FDTL junior officers speak little to no Portuguese. The advisor added that the officers were getting nothing out of the course because they could not understand Reis, and that this was unfortunate since most of the officers speak English at a working level - a language which Reis speaks reasonably well. The advisor went on to say that Reis was on a one-man mission to promote Portuguese language and culture within F-FDTL, and that his primary mission of teaching and advising on military issues was clearly secondary. He concluded by saying that the Portuguese advisors to F-FDTL would be vastly

more successful if they taught military subjects in English.
(Note. The vast majority of Portuguese advisors as well as the defense attachi speak English well to fluently. End note.)

¶6. (C/NF) It appears that Major Reis reportedly answers only to Army Headquarters in Lisbon, and does not report to anyone in the Portuguese Mission in Dili - not even the Ambassador. Recently, the Portuguese Defense Attachi to Timor-Leste, Air Force Colonel Cipriano Figueiredo, admitted that while there are concerns with Reis, the Major is so entrenched in the process that if he were pulled out now, "the entire recruit training house of cards would come tumbling down". Figueiredo went on to say that Portugal unfortunately still practices something it was infamous for up to the end of its colonial experience in 1974: sending its problem officers out of sight and out of mind - far away from Lisbon to places like Timor-Leste. Although Figueiredo senses that something is amiss in Metinaro, it appears he is incapable of influencing the situation there despite his seniority.

¶7. (C/NF) Ironies abound with respect to the emphasis on the Portuguese language. Figueiredo himself has said that English is vitally important to the development of F-FDTL, particularly since it is the language of international peacekeeping operations, maritime operations, and increasingly fundamental to interacting with other defense forces throughout the region (all are stated GOTL and F-FDTL top priorities). He added that even the courses F-FDTL members have attended in China have all been taught in English, and that all future training to be conducted in China on the two recently purchased Shanghai-class patrol boats would be in English.

¶8. (C/NF) Prime Minister Gusmao, Secretary of State for Defense Julio Tomas Pinto, and F-FDTL's Chief, Brigadier General Taur Matan Ruak, while in agreement that F-FDTL must

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professionalize and develop, have all exhibited a hands-off approach to the details of the recruit training plan. This effectively leaves the execution of the plan in the hands of F-FDTL Chief of Staff, Colonel Lere Anan Timur, and Lieutenant Colonel Falur, both of whom are former guerilla fighters with little professional military training or experience, and little formal education. Australian defense advisors close to the F-FDTL leadership have said that since the Portuguese training team will only have a limited amount of time in Timor-Leste, Lere and Falur feel they must execute the recruit training in accordance with Reis' plan to ensure the future of the Portuguese language within F-FDTL. This can be attributed to both officer's immersion in the Portuguese language during the Indonesian occupation, when the language was the chief non-indigenous language used by the guerillas.

¶9. (C/NF) The Australian Defense Cooperation Program (DCP), a 25-man advisory team that has worked closely with F-FDTL since 2002, has the ability to conduct recruit training on a continual basis and in Tetum, Timor-Leste's other official language that is spoken by a broad segment of the population. The DCP commander has said that his team could provide basic training to a constant flow of recruits (i.e. 10-20) so that F-FDTL's ranks could grow in small, manageable increments over a period of time. Despite the fact that there would be obvious benefits to adopting this more measured approach to growth, the standing approach adopted by the Timorese has been that Portugal would take the lead on basic training and Australia more advanced training.

¶10. (C/NF) Australian sources are reporting that as of the final screening, only 300-400 recruits have been selected for the upcoming training - a number that is considerably short of the target of 600. The Australians claim the shortfall is directly attributable to a minimum height standard being imposed on prospective recruits that may unintentionally be denying entry to significant swaths of the Timorese population. The same sources report that if this standard remains unchanged, there will likely be a disproportionate amount of recruits from certain eastern district tribes, and from the Bunak tribe found in the extreme southwest where the population tends to be taller. This would counter the stated intent of recruiting new soldiers proportionately from all regions of the country, thus mitigating the east-west regional tensions which characterized 2006's desertions. Incidentally, if this height standard were applied to those currently serving in F-FDTL, neither force commander Brigadier General Ruak nor chief of staff Colonel Lere would qualify.

MARFORPAC's Offer of Assistance

¶11. (C) During the April 2-3 visit of U.S. Marine Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC) Commander, Lieutenant General Keith Stalder to Timor-Leste, Lere, Falur and Reis briefed on the soon-to-be-executed recruit training plan. Stalder indicated that MARFORPAC was ready to host a small contingent of F-FDTL leaders at bases in California to see how the Marines train their recruits and NCOs, and to discuss with F-FDTL how future recruit training could be developed. So far, GOTL and F-FDTL leaders have expressed enthusiasm about such interaction. Stalder also mentioned that there could be training opportunities for F-FDTL during the visit of a contingent from the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit in October 2009, when a number of bilateral (or multilateral, if the Australian-led

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International Stabilization Force is included) training engagements could occur.

Back to the Future?

¶12. (C) Comment. A key concern is that a flawed basic training regimen would fundamentally retard progress toward the professionalization of the F-FDTL. It could result once again in tensions within the force similar to those which arose almost immediately following its formation in 2002, and could culminate in yet another unraveling as witnessed in 2006. The military "petitioners" who deserted in March 2006 left largely because they felt they were being led incompetently, and were being mistreated by many of the ex-guerilla leaders such as Lere and Falur. They were almost all new soldiers, the product of a poorly designed recruit training process in 2002 and 2003. Most of the petitioners were not members of the armed resistance against the Indonesian occupation, a point of separation which contributed significantly to their collective maltreatment at the hands of several F-FDTL ex-guerilla senior leaders. In many ways, the recruit class of 2009 could develop similar grievances if it starts off the as the product of a flawed training plan.

¶13. (C) Post will continue to encourage the GOTL and the F-FDTL leadership to be critical, analytical, and cautious with regards to the way ahead with an emphasis on not repeating previous missteps, and to look closely at the role of each of its donors as it relates to F-FDTL's development. Also, additional U.S. mil-to-mil engagement, particularly initiatives led by MARFORPAC, will remain most welcome. End comment.
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